

NSC BRIEFING

16 May 1956

SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

1. Shortly after the departure of Bulganin and Khrushchev following their Dec '55 Afghan visit, Soviet negotiators of considerable rank made their appearance and Soviet survey teams began fanning out across Afghanistan, visiting such places as Jلالabad and Kandahar near the Pakistani border. For the first time, Soviet advisers were actually able to establish themselves within an Afghan government office--the Ministry of Public Works. One interesting measure of the intensity of these Soviet activities in Afghanistan is the fact that Afghan resident visas have been issued to 400 Russian technicians in the first three months of 1956. This is a 300% increase over the previous maximum number of resident Soviet technicians before the Soviet leaders' visit. Twenty of the 400 visas are reportedly for Soviet policemen and detectives.

2. The \$100,000,000 credit which Kabul accepted from Bulganin and Khrushchev is more than four times the Afghan government's annual revenue. It is estimated that \$30 to \$60 million of it has been committed under a 1 March project agreement. This agreement provides for: (1) reconstruction of the Kabul airport, (2) development of a new military airfield about thirty miles north of Kabul, and (3) construction of two electric power stations, three motor repair shops, a laboratory, a fertilizer plant, a new road across the Hindu Kush, and three irrigation dams (one of them reportedly only thirty miles from the Khyber Pass.) Meanwhile, as many as 30 to 75 trucks are reportedly

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arrived in Kabul from the USSR during February and March, and [redacted]

[redacted]
[redacted] The Afghans

have made every possible use of the transit facilities through the USSR (under the June '55 agreement) for foreign trade. Shipments to and from West Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia countries, England, Japan, India and even the US are apparently passing through bloc ports on the Black, Baltic, and Japan Seas.

3. In addition to Soviet activities, the role of the Satellites has expanded. Czechoslovakia has reportedly offered another \$10 million credit (in addition to \$5 million previously extended). The Czechs reportedly have also sold Afghanistan more than \$10 million worth of telephone equipment, of which about \$7 million was credit. East Germany is apparently offering a \$5 million credit and pushing hard for diplomatic recognition in return. The Afghan "peace mission" touring Czechoslovakia in April reported being "impressed" by a MiG-15 demonstration in Prague. Meanwhile Czech technicians have been replacing East German technicians employed by the Afghan government. Trade missions from other Satellites, including Poland and East Germany, from Poland, Hungary and Rumania are also reported en route to Kabul.

4. Despite this accelerated bloc activity (or, alternatively, because of it) the Afghans are taking pains to demonstrate their continuing interest in doing business with the US. In March, King Zahir Shah made a special tour of the Helmand Valley project and lavished praise on the work. Although an American offer of \$10,000,000 assistance in Afghanistan's air development has been

turned "less than generous" by some Afghan officials, Prime Minister Daud welcomed it and promised his personal co-operation to see that it was implemented. Although arrangements had already been made for shipment of 300 US trucks via the USSR, Foreign Minister Rahn has acceded to a US request that they be shipped via Pakistan. Most striking overture to the US has been the request, early in May, by the Afghan Chief of Staff that some of his officers be trained in American military schools and that the US pressure the Turks to undertake the training of additional Afghan officers (70 to 80 are currently in Turkey).

B. These overtures constitute part of Afghan Premier Daud's policy of working both sides of the street, a game which he views as insurance for Afghanistan's continued independence. However, Daud's freedom of action in this game is becoming more and more limited. One reason for this is that Afghanistan's present close links with the Bloc have narrowed the field in which he can promote competition between the US and the USSR.

A. As an example of this problem, Daud first suggested that the US use its \$10 million aviation development offer cooperatively with the USSR in rebuilding the Kabul airport (a project which he had already committed "in principle" to the Soviets). The Russians, he suggested, might build the runways, while the US installed communications equipment. After considerable negotiation, however, Daud backed off and indicated that, for the time being, the Kabul airport project must be withheld from either side.

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B. Another factor limiting Daud's freedom of action is his adamant anti-Pakistan policy, which virtually eliminates the possibility of additional Afghan ties with the West through regional co-operation projects involving both nations.

6. To look at the future, Daud probably still cherishes the hope of massive US aid, balancing what he has accepted from the USSR, as well as US political support--or at least neutrality--in his relations with Pakistan. However, he would probably be prepared to accept something less--especially if he thought it would serve as a sort of insurance policy which would protect Afghanistan against the day when the USSR may attempt to make political capital out of its economic investment. The danger for Daud, however, is that unless such insurance can be arranged fairly soon, Soviet penetration may well reach the point where this sort of protection has become impossible to attain.

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- I. Soviet negotiators, technicians pouring into Afghanistan ever since Bulganin/Khrushchev Dec '55 visit.
 - A. Actually set up offices in Ministry of Public Works.
 - B. 460 visas issued to Russians through March '56: 300% increase.
- II. \$30 to \$60 million of \$100 million credit already committed (13 projects).
 - A. 50-75 truckloads small arms.
 - B. Transit traffic through USSR booming.
- III. Satellites also offering new credit and trade.
 - A. \$10 to \$16 million more from Czechs.
 - B. \$5 million from East Germans.
 - C. Czechs replacing W. German engineers.
- IV. At same time, continuing overtures to US.
 - A. King praises Helmand Valley project, Daud welcomes US offer aviation development.
 - B. Army wants officers to get US and Turkish training.
- V. Daud still playing both sides of street, but now less space for game, because:
 - A. massive commitments to USSR
 - B. adamant anti-Pakistan policy
- VI. Daud probably still eager get "insurance policy" from US but increasing Soviet ties may soon make this impossible.

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